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Thursday 5 January 1978 [REDACTED]

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CHILE: Pres. Pinochet's story

[REDACTED] Chilean President Pinochet appears to have won a handsome personal victory in yesterday's plebiscite. The vote surpassed his own best hopes for the outcome. The latest available figures indicate that about 78 percent of the voting populace approved his rule.

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[REDACTED] We expect Pinochet simply to ignore critics of the voting process, which was heavily loaded to ensure a favorable result. He will make the most of the victory as evidence of the regime's legitimacy and of his own political wisdom. In months to come, Pinochet is likely to have reason to regret this exercise in manipulating public opinion, which probably has raised political expectations that the government will not want to meet. But for now, Pinochet is in a privileged position.

[REDACTED] Having consolidated his superior position in the junta, Pinochet will have a free hand in many areas. Probably at least the more outspoken of his critics on the junta, Air Force General Leigh, will be obliged to retire. Another junta member, Admiral Merino, might also step aside.

[REDACTED] Pinochet's win will galvanize support in the military, where doubt about his judgment and leadership was beginning to spread.

[REDACTED] Options on the domestic scene are broader. Pinochet is almost certain to be tougher toward opponents in political and labor circles, but he could go either way toward the public generally. He might loosen some of the more onerous security restrictions such as the curfew, but he will see no need to narrow his definition of subversion.

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[REDACTED] The effect of the plebiscite on Pinochet's approach to foreign policy is harder to judge. Elated by the popular denigration of international criticism, he might go so far as to pull Chile out of the UN. He is more likely, however, to wait to see what impact the vote has internationally. [REDACTED]

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